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Abed el-Rahman Tayyara

Cleveland State University, [a.tayyara@csuohio.edu](mailto:a.tayyara@csuohio.edu)

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# IBN ḤABĪB'S *KITĀB AL-MUḤABBAR* AND ITS PLACE IN EARLY ISLAMIC HISTORICAL WRITING

ABED EL-RAHMAN TAYYARA  
*Cleveland State University*

Biographical evidence about Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb (d. 860) is slim. Almost nothing is known about his father, and even the name 'Ḥabīb'<sup>1</sup> is believed to be associated with his mother. Al-Ḥashimī and al-Baghdādī are two *nisbas* attached to Ibn Ḥabīb, the first of which derives from his mother being a client (*mawlā*) of a Ḥāshimī family, and the second of which implies that Ibn Ḥabīb spent a considerable part of his life in Baghdad. The long list of works ascribed to Ibn Ḥabīb testifies to his multifaceted scholarly interests in genealogy, grammar, history, and poetry. Many of his teachers were prominent genealogists and philologists, but he was predominantly influenced by Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. 819).<sup>2</sup> He was also the narrator of many earlier literary works, particularly those of al-Kalbī.

A reference to Ibn Ḥabīb's authority on Arab genealogy and pre-Islamic history appears in the *Fihrist* where we are told that he composed a book titled *Kitāb al-Qabā'il al-Kabīr wa-l-ayyām* at the request of al-Faṭḥ b. Khāqān (d. 860).<sup>3</sup> Not only does this account testify to Ibn Ḥabīb's expertise in these areas, it also implies that he maintained good relations with the 'Abbasid court.<sup>4</sup> His contribution to the evolution of genealogical writings seems to be related to the assumption that his *Kitāb*

<sup>1</sup> Although the name 'Ḥabīb' is a masculine form, Muslim biographers associate it with Ibn Ḥabīb's mother.

<sup>2</sup> al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh Baghdād aw Madīnat al-salām* (ed. Muṣṭafā Aṭā; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004), ii. 276; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (ed. Yūsuf Ṭawīl; Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 171–2; Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-'udabā': Irshād al-arīb ilā ma'rifat al-adīb* (ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās; Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), vi. 2481; Ilse Lichtenstädter, 'Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb and His *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1 (Jan. 1939): 1–27, at 1–7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 171.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Khāqān was a patron of famous literary figures and an influential person at the court of al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861).

*al-Mushajjar* was the first Islamic work to offer a tabular arrangement of genealogies in the form of a family tree.<sup>5</sup> References to Ibn Ḥabīb's writings in later Islamic sources figure primarily in the context of genealogy<sup>6</sup> and poetry,<sup>7</sup> but rarely in history.<sup>8</sup> Ibn Ḥabīb's historical writing, which is neglected by later Muslim historians,<sup>9</sup> appears primarily in his *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*,<sup>10</sup> the focus of the current article.

## 1. LITERATURE OF THE FIELD

The relatively scant studies on Ibn Ḥabīb's works appear primarily in the context of pre-Islamic poetry, genealogies, and history. For example, his *Kitāb man nusiba ilā ummihi min al-shu'arā'* (The Book of poets named after their mothers) was the subject of an investigation by Giorgio Levi Della Vida.<sup>11</sup> Among Ibn Ḥabīb's works to draw the most scholarly attention is *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*. Ilse Lichtenstädter, the first to edit the *Muḥabbar*, offers general biographical details about Ibn Ḥabīb and examines the content of this work.<sup>12</sup> The *Muḥabbar* figures in Alfred Beeston's study of the story of Yemeni women who celebrated the Prophet's death.<sup>13</sup> The use of the *Muḥabbar* in conjunction with Ibn Ḥabīb's other works as sources for genealogical information appears in some studies. For example, Asad Ahmed refers to Ibn Ḥabīb's writings in the context of matrilineal genealogical narratives and their

<sup>5</sup> Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 2nd rev. edn., 1968), 97.

<sup>6</sup> al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* (eds. Suhayl Zakkār and Riyād Ziriklī; Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), i. 22, 41; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Anbāh 'alā qabā'il al-ruwāh* (ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī; Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1985), 15.

<sup>7</sup> al-Aṣḥānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (eds. Iḥṣān 'Abbās, Ibrāhīm al-Sa'āfin, and Bakr 'Abbās; Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 3rd edn., 2008), ii. 60, 63, 68–9, 86; iii. 79–92.

<sup>8</sup> al-Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf* (ed. M. J. De Goeje; Leiden: Brill, 1894), 190.

<sup>9</sup> Lichtenstädter, 'Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb', 6.

<sup>10</sup> An allusion to Ibn Ḥabīb's intention to underline the importance of these works and present himself as a knowledgeable scholar can be seen in his use of the pattern *mufa'al* in the titles of his books, such as *al-Muḥabbar*, *al-Munammaq*, *al-Muwashshā*, *al-Mushajjar*, and *al-Mudhahhab*.

<sup>11</sup> Giorgio Levi Della Vida discusses the authenticity of this work and provides textual analysis. See 'Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb's "Matronymics of Poets"', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 62/ 3 (Sep. 1942): 156–71.

<sup>12</sup> Lichtenstädter, 'Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb', 1–27.

<sup>13</sup> Alfred Beeston, 'The So-Called Harlots of Ḥaḍramawt', *Oriens*, 5/1 (1952): 16–22.

prosopographical implications.<sup>14</sup> Yet, some scholars underestimate *al-Muḥabbar*'s importance as a historical work.<sup>15</sup>

Ibn Ḥabīb's historical writing and that of other Muslim scholars are compared in some studies. Such is the case with Julia Bray who compares Ibn Ḥabīb's arrangement of lists with that of Ibn Qutayba (d. 889).<sup>16</sup> Ilkka Lindstedt refers to *al-Muḥabbar* to illustrate al-Madā'īnī's (d. 844) influence on Ibn Ḥabīb's writings.<sup>17</sup> The *Muḥabbar* as a universal history is examined by Monika Springberg-Hinsen within her discussion of the emergence of early Islamic universal histories. She refers briefly to *al-Muḥabbar* and its content, pointing out that this work constitutes the earliest form of Islamic universal history.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the connection between the *Muḥabbar* and early Islamic universal historical writing is also made in passing by Bray.<sup>19</sup> However, these two studies stop short of providing either concrete examples of universal history or a textual analysis of these forms.

This paper examines Ibn Ḥabīb's historical writing in *al-Muḥabbar* in terms of narrative strategies, thematic structure, and historical objectives. It is premised on the claim that the *Muḥabbar* reflects an important stage<sup>20</sup> in the evolution of early Islamic historiography in

<sup>14</sup> Asad Ahmed, *The Religious Elite of the Early Islamic Hijaz: Five Prosopographical Case Studies* (Oxford: Linacre College Unit for Prosopographical Research, 2011), 1–12.

<sup>15</sup> Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 10; Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 122; Albrecht Noth and Lawrence Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition, A Source-Critical Study* (transl. Michael Bonner; Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 2nd edn. [1st Engl. edn.], 1994), 97.

<sup>16</sup> Julia Bray, 'Lists and Memory: Ibn Qutayba and Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb' in Farhad Daftary and Josef Meri (eds.), *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung* (London: I.B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2003), 210–31, esp. 221–4.

<sup>17</sup> Ilkka Lindstedt, 'The Role of al-Madā'īnī's Students in the Transmission of his Materials', *Der Islam*, 91/2 (2014): 295–340, at 318–19.

<sup>18</sup> Monika Springberg-Hinsen, *Die Zeit vor dem Islam in arabischen Universalgeschichten des 9. bis 12. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg: Echter; Attenberge; Telos, 1989), 19–23.

<sup>19</sup> Bray uses the phrase 'outline of universal history from the Creation', 'Lists and Memory', 211.

<sup>20</sup> For the different stages in the evolution of early Islamic historical writing, I follow primarily Chase Robinson, who identifies three phases in the development of Islamic historiography. During the first (610–ca. 730) Islamic interest in history revolves primarily around the life of the Prophet, his teaching, and battles. The second stage (ca. 730–ca. 830) was the real beginning of Islamic historiography,

general<sup>21</sup> and the emergence of early forms of Islamic universal histories in particular. I use, for this study, a comparative textual examination along with *isnād* analysis whenever it is possible. I begin, however, with a brief account of the background against which early Islamic universal histories evolved.

## 2. AL-MUḤABBAR AND EARLY ISLAMIC UNIVERSAL HISTORICAL WRITINGS

A cursory look at the *Muḥabbar*'s major themes and structure might give the inaccurate impression that this work primarily concerns genealogies and tabular presentations of *jāhili* (i.e., pre-Islamic) and early Islamic history. A closer textual analysis of the work's narrative arrangements and structure, however, illustrates its important role in the evolution of early Islamic historiography and particularly the rise of universal historical writings.<sup>22</sup> Among early Islamic universal histories, which appeared between the second half of the ninth century and into the tenth century, are the works of Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), al-Ya'qūbī (d. 897), al-Dīnawarī (d. 898), al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956), and al-Maqqisī (d. ca. 970).<sup>23</sup>

Universal histories in general begin with remote origins and continue to the time of the author, while portraying other known nations and cultures on the way. Among the main themes presented in early Islamic universal histories are: the creation story; prophetic (biblical) history; history of kings, lands and nations; pre-Islamic history; Muḥammad's life and prophethood (*nubuwwa*); and the caliphate. Early Islamic universal

when biographical dictionaries and histories of the Islamic conquests emerged. The third phase (ca. 830–ca. 925) witnessed sophisticated monographic works that were based on early Islamic historical genres. Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 18–38.

<sup>21</sup> For other studies on early Islamic historiography see 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dūrī, *Baḥṭh fī nash'at 'ilm al-ta'rikh 'inda l-'arab* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1993), 33–34; Khalidī, *Arabic Historical Thought*; Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1998), 98–146.

<sup>22</sup> Hājī Khalīfa classifies *al-Muḥabbar* as a historical work that deals primarily with the history of the caliphate, in Muḥammad Yāltqāyā and Rifāt Bilgah al-Kilīsī (eds.), *Kashf al-Zunūn 'an asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn* (Tehran: al-Maktaba al-Islāmiyya, 3rd edn., 1967), i. 293.

<sup>23</sup> For an excellent survey of the content of these works see Bernd Radtke, *Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung im Mittelalterlichen Islam* (Beirut and Stuttgart: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1992), 9–95.

histories revolve around the objective to present Islam in comparison with other religions and nations as the most significant achievement in human history. This distinctive status of Islam is exclusively premised on Muḥammad's unique status as the 'seal of the prophets (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*)'. Not only does this term indicate that his prophethood is the last in the succession of divine messages that began with Adam, it also signifies that Islam concludes previous messages.<sup>24</sup> Efforts to emphasize this distinguished place of Islam, therefore, is closely connected to the religious needs of the early Islamic community to preserve the Prophet's biography and legacy. These endeavours constitute the earliest forms of Islamic historical thought, where the focus was limited to local and religious Arab-Islamic concerns.<sup>25</sup> At this stage, Qur'ānic narratives, prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*), genealogies (*ansāb*),<sup>26</sup> biographies (*ṭabaqāt*), and *jāhili* traditions were the principal sources used by early Muslim scholars to conserve the Prophet's memory and tradition.<sup>27</sup>

Muslims' encounters with other religions and nations stimulated new historiographical endeavours to extend local Arab-Islamic viewpoints to broader historical correlations and universal contexts to give Islam a more conspicuous place in world history. Not only did this transition entail the rearrangement of Arab-Islamic narratives, but also instigated the search for new non-Islamic sources to supplement insufficient information. Biblical-Jewish materials were the first sources that Muslims consulted to highlight the prophetic origins and the sequentiality of Muḥammad's *nubuwwa*.

<sup>24</sup> David Powers, *Muḥammad is not the Father of Any of Your Men: the Making of the Last Prophet* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), esp. 52–4, 68–9; William M. Watt, 'The Nature of Muḥammad's Prophethood', *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies*, 8 (1987): 77–84; Jalal al-Haqq, 'Epistemology of Prophethood in Islam', *al-Tawḥīd*, 4/2 (1987): 53–71.

<sup>25</sup> Fred Donner believes that the needs of the Islamic community were initially moral rather than historical. Explaining the evolution of Islamic historical thought, he offers four models of legitimization: pietistic, genealogical, theocratic, and historicizing. See Donner, *Narratives*, 97–144.

<sup>26</sup> For a good discussion of the early development of Islamic genealogy see Werner Caskel, *Ġamharat an-nasab: Das Genealogische Werk des Hišām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī*, (Leiden: Brill, 1966), i. 19–47; Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies* (transl. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern; Chicago, IL: Aldine, 1967), i. 164–98; Zoltán Szombathy, *The Roots of Arabic Genealogy: A Study in Historical Anthropology* (Piliscsaba: The Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, 2003), 5–12; Ahmed, *The Religious Elite*, 4–5 nos. 9–12; Majied Robinson, *Prosopographical Approaches to the Nasab Tradition: a Study of Marriage and Concubinage in the Tribe of Muḥammad, 500–750 CE* (unpublished PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2013), 71–84.

<sup>27</sup> Rosenthal, *A History*, 26–30.



The thematic and chronological reorganization of prophetic narratives and the incorporation of new sources, particularly biblical materials, initiated the earliest stages in the process of allocating Islam a prominent place in universal history. This orientation is evident in the appearance of different models for the chronological arrangements of prophetic materials, which early Muslim historians classified under the rubric of periodization of history (*ta'rikh*).<sup>28</sup> Genealogical materials related to the Prophet<sup>29</sup> served, as we shall see, as a connecting channel in transforming Islamic presentations of prophetic narratives from an Islamic religious milieu to a universal setting.<sup>30</sup> Three major non-Islamic chronological systems influenced early Islamic chronological arrangements:<sup>31</sup> Jewish,<sup>32</sup> Christian,<sup>33</sup> and

<sup>28</sup> Khalīfa b. Khayyāt al-ʿUṣfurī, *Ta'rikh* (ed. Akram al-ʿUmārī; Riyadh: Dār Tayyiba, 1985), 50; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif* (ed. Tharwat ʿUkāsha; Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2nd edn., 1969), 57; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Abū l-Faḍl; Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1960), i. 193; M. J. de Goeje (ed.), *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammad ibn Djarir al-Tabari) (Leiden: Brill, 15 vols. in 12, 1879–1901; [cited hereafter as ed. De Goeje]), i. 200–1; al-Masʿūdī, *Tanbih*, 196; al-Maḡdisī, *Kitāb al-Bad' wa-l-Ta'rikh* (Livre de la creation et l'histoire) (ed. C. Huart; repr. Beirut: Maktabat Khayyāt, 6 vols. in 3, n.d.) ii. 151–5.

<sup>29</sup> For the use of the Prophet's genealogy as a model for defining tribal structure see Daniel Varisco, 'Metaphors and Sacred History: The Genealogy of Muhammad and the Arab "Tribe"', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 68/3, 'Anthropological Analysis and Islamic Texts' (July, 1995): 139–56.

<sup>30</sup> Rosenthal was among the first scholars to draw the connection between genealogy and historiography in general and universal history in particular. See *A History*, 21–2.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Masʿūdī was among the first Muslim historians to give a detailed discussion of these different eras. See Charles Pellat (ed.), *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar* (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmi'a al-Lubnāniyya, 1965), ii. 415–16.

<sup>32</sup> Jewish calculations were based on the Old Testament that appears in Islamic sources in three versions: Hebrew, Greek, and Samaritan. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, i. 17–18 (ed. De Goeje, i. 16); Ḥamza al-Isfahānī, *Ta'rikh sinī mulūk al-ard wa-l-anbiyā'* (ed. I. M. E. Gottwald; Leipzig, Petrograd: Leopold Voss, 1844–8), 153; Abū al-Fidā, *al-Mukhtaṣar fī akhbār al-bashar* (eds. Muḥammad Zaynum, Muḥammad ʿAzab, Yaḥyā Ḥusayn and Muḥammad Fakhr al-Waṣīf; Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1999), i. 15–18; Everett Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and Fate: Al-ʿĀmirī's Kitāb al-Amad ʿalā l-abad* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1988), 62 (transl., 63).

<sup>33</sup> Christians followed two models of chronology, the first of which was the Old Testament, which is based on the Septuagint. They also calculated time according to the era of Alexander the Great. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, i. 18 (ed. De Goeje, i. 16); al-Birūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiya ʿan al-qurʾān al-khāliya* (ed. Parvīz

Persian.<sup>34</sup> However, Islamic incorporation of these eras was a gradual process in which biblical-Jewish sources were the first to affect Islamic chronological portrayals of prophetic narratives and methods of time calculations. Ibn Ḥabīb's *al-Muḥabbar* represents, as this article will illustrate, one of the earliest Islamic efforts to chronologically reconfigure prophetic materials, eventually creating broader thematic interconnections and universal historical contexts. The following sections provide textual analysis of certain accounts that testify to features of universal historical writings in the *Muḥabbar*.

### 3. PROPHETIC NARRATIVES

Ibn Ḥabīb opens the *Muḥabbar* with chronological mapping of prophetic history, demonstrating both the sequentiality and finality of Muḥammad's prophethood. The section is divided into three tabular<sup>35</sup> models, each of which offers a different chronological angle showing progression in prophetic history. The first section concerns the prophetic intervals between Adam and Muḥammad, whereas the second part follows chronologically the significant phases in prophetic narratives and important events in Jewish history. Ibn Ḥabīb's third account of prophetic narratives revolves around a list of biblical prophets along with their life-spans.

#### 3.1 *Prophetic intervals*

Under the first part of the *Muḥabbar*'s prophetic presentation one finds the following account:

Abū Saʿīd al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sukkarī said: Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb related to us saying that Abū Ḥātim al-Bajalī mentioned on the authority of Hishām b. al-Kalbī and his father, of Abū Ṣāliḥ, of ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās recounting that: 2200 years were between Adam, may peace be upon him, and Noah; 1143 (or according to others 1142) years separated Noah and Abraham, may peace be upon him; from Abraham to Moses 575 (or 565) years; between

Azkāʿī; Tehran: Mirās-i Maktūb, 2001), 183; Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, 188–92.

<sup>34</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Maʿārif*, 58; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, i. 18–19 (ed. De Goeje, i. 17); al-Birūnī, *Āthār*, 114–15.

<sup>35</sup> Bray, 'Lists and Memory', 221–3; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 23; Noth and Conrad, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 96–108; Stefan Leder, 'The Literary Use of the *Khabar*, A Basic Form of Historical Writing' in Averil Cameron and Lawrence Conrad (eds.), *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, I: *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1989), 309.



Moses and David 590 (or 579); between David and Jesus 1053; and 600 years separate Jesus and Muḥammad, may God praise and protect him as well as all prophets. This is Ibn al-Kalbī's version (*qawl*).<sup>36</sup>

The account is narrated by Ibn Ḥabīb's student, Abū Saʿīd al-Sukkārī (d. 888), and includes a full chain of transmission (*isnād*), which is uncharacteristic of the *Muḥabbar*. An analysis of both the report and its *isnād* suggests, as we shall see, features of the shift in early Islamic historical thought from local concerns to broader historical representations. To start with the content, Ibn Ḥabīb portrays chronologically prophetic intervals separating Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Muḥammad. His narrative arrangement resonates with the Islamic belief in the successiveness and finality of Muḥammad's prophethood. With the exception of David and Solomon, who appear in Islamic sources as prophet-kings,<sup>37</sup> these names are considered in Islam leading prophet-messengers associated with important junctures in prophetic history. This narrative structure signifies, therefore, early Islamic efforts to place Muḥammad's prophethood within a larger context of prophetic narratives and broader historical interconnections. The reference to two versions for these intervals seems to indicate different sources used by Muslim scholars, but it also shows that chronological organization of prophetic materials came at a later stage in Islamic historical writing. Ibn Ḥabīb's conclusion, saying that this is Ibn al-Kalbī's version, shows the influence of the latter on him, and also suggests the important role that early Islamic genealogical tradition played in the placement of prophetic narratives within universal historical contexts. To further assess these conjectures, it is constructive to first analyse the report's *isnād* and then compare it with those of other Muslim scholars.

### 3.1.1 *The isnād of Hishām al-Kalbī → Muḥammad al-Kalbī → Abū Sālih → Ibn ʿAbbās*

The report's *isnād* includes the names of Abū Ḥātim al-Bajalī,<sup>38</sup> Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. 819), Muḥammad b. Sāʿib al-Kalbī (d. 763-64),

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Muḥabbar* (ed. Ilse Lichtenstädter; Hyderabad: Maṭbaʿat Jāmʿiyat Dāʿirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1942), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2004), 15–16; Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature* (transl. M. Robertson; Richmond: Curzon, 2002), 35–7; See also my article 'Prophethood and Kingship in Early Islamic Historical Thought', *Der Islam*, 84 (2007): 73–102, esp. 83–4.

<sup>38</sup> I was unable to identify Abū Ḥātim al-Bajalī. Lichtenstädter raises the possibility that he was Abū Ḥātim b. Ḥibbān al-Qabīd b. al-Faḍl. Interestingly, the name of Abū Ḥātim appears in the *Maʿārif* as one of Ibn Qutayba's

Abū Ṣāliḥ (d. 719), and ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abbās (d. 687). The names of Hishām al-Kalbī, Muḥammad al-Kalbī, Abū Ṣāliḥ, and Ibn ‘Abbās figure prominently in several *akhbār*-oriented accounts that reflect efforts to chronologize Arab–Islamic events or non-Islamic narratives.<sup>39</sup> Such is the case with the story of Adam’s fall,<sup>40</sup> biblical figures,<sup>41</sup> the Flood,<sup>42</sup> the number of years that separate Adam and the Prophet’s birth,<sup>43</sup> the building of the Ka’ba,<sup>44</sup> pre-Islamic history,<sup>45</sup> the Prophet’s lineage and prophetic genealogies,<sup>46</sup> the Prophet’s birth<sup>47</sup> and his life-span.<sup>48</sup> This *isnād* reflects, I believe, significant phases in the evolution of early Islamic historiography, particularly with regards to chronological representations and the placement of local Arab-Islamic themes within larger historical settings. To further evaluate these conjectures some biographical information about these scholars is in order.

To start with Ibn ‘Abbās, he is one of the well-known Companions who figures prominently in Islamic sources as a trustworthy *ḥadīth* transmitter and narrator. He is also portrayed as an expert in Qur’ānic exegesis, poetry, and genealogy.<sup>49</sup> Reference to Ibn ‘Abbās also appears in early Islamic historical writings, particularly in reports associated with prophetic stories<sup>50</sup> and the chronologization of important events in the formative phases of Islam.<sup>51</sup> As for Abū Ṣāliḥ Bādhām (or Bādhān), he

authorities; ‘Ukāsha identifies him with Sahl b. Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim al-Sijistānī (d. 868). ‘Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb’, 23; *Ma’ārif*, 67/1.

<sup>39</sup> Caskel, *Ġamharat*, i. 73–4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (ed. Muḥammad ‘Atā; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997), i. 30; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, i. 156–61, 167 (ed. De Goeje, i. 156–63, 170).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, i. 163–67 (ed. De Goeje, i. 165–70).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, i. 185–9 (ed. De Goeje, i. 192–7).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, i. 237 (ed. De Goeje, i. 1071).

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, i. 39; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, i. 12–13.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, i. 32, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, i. 47, 58; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, i. 10, 17, 55.

<sup>47</sup> Khalīfa, *Ta’riḫ*, 53.

<sup>48</sup> al-Mas’ūdī, *Murūj*, iii. 18–19.

<sup>49</sup> On the important role of Ibn ‘Abbās as a scholar and *ḥadīth* transmitter see Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, ii. 278–84; Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* (ed. Mustafa ‘Atā; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1994), v. 245–8; Harrald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools* (transl. Marion Katz; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 141–2, 287–8.

<sup>50</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, i. 279–89, 385–431 (ed. De Goeje, i. 310, 322, 443–501).

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Musannaf fī al-aḥādīth wa-l-āthār* (ed. Kamāl al-Hūt; Beirut: Dār al-Tāj, 1989), vii. 328–9; al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Ta’riḫ al-kabīr* (Hyderabad: Maṭba‘at Jam‘iyyat Dā‘irat al-Ma’ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1941), i. 8–10.

was one of Ibn 'Abbās' students and the *mawlā* of Umm Hānī' (d. ca. 661), the daughter of Abū Ṭālib. He transmitted reports regarding Qur'ānic exegesis and prophetic tradition on the authority of many Companions, such as Umm Hānī',<sup>52</sup> Abū Hurayra (d. 681), and Ibn 'Abbās.<sup>53</sup> Muslim scholars considered Abū Ṣāliḥ, on the whole, as a trustworthy scholar and an authority on Qur'ānic exegesis and biblical stories.<sup>54</sup> However, some Muslim scholars question his reliability when it comes to religious reports that he relates on Ibn 'Abbās' authority.<sup>55</sup> Abū Ṣāliḥ's trustworthiness is even more problematic when it concerns reports that the Kalbīs traced back to him.

The contributions of Muḥammad al-Kalbī and his son, Hishām, to the evolution of early Islamic historical writing are undeniable.<sup>56</sup> This is evident in the multifaceted areas of knowledge that Muslim biographers ascribe to the Kalbīs, such as Qur'ānic exegesis, genealogy, philology, Arab-Islamic history, and non-Islamic materials, particularly biblical sources.<sup>57</sup> The process of cultivating these scholarly areas began with Muḥammad al-Kalbī and was developed by his son, Hishām.<sup>58</sup> Scholarly associations between Abū Ṣāliḥ and Muḥammad al-Kalbī echo in some Islamic sources.<sup>59</sup> For example, Ibn al-Nadīm relates that Abū Ṣāliḥ was the main authority for Muḥammad al-Kalbī on the genealogy of the Quraysh that the former received from 'Aqīl b. Abī Ṭālib (d. ca. 669), an authority on the subject.<sup>60</sup> However, other

<sup>52</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, i. 295–6 (ed. De Goeje, i. 329–30).

<sup>53</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vi. 299; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, i. 299, 303 (ed. De Goeje, i. 333–4, 338–9). Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, I, 146–47; al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-I'tidāl fī naqd al-rijāl* (eds. 'Alī Mu'awwād and 'Adīl 'Abd al-Mawjūd; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1995), ii. 3–4.

<sup>54</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vi. 299–300.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif*, 47; Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *al-Muntakhab min al-'ilal lil-khallāl* (ed. Abū Mu'adh Ṭāriq b. 'Awad Allāh Muḥammad; Riyadh: Dār al-Rāya, 1998), 127.

<sup>56</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 152–7; Donner, *Narratives*, 245; Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 51–4; Dūrī, *Nash'at*, 40–1, 126–7; Nisar Ahmed Faruqi, *Early Muslim Historiography: A Study of Early Transmitters of Arab History from the Rise of Islam up to the end of Umayyad Period 612–750 AD*, (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1979), 58–67; Caskel, *Ġamharat*, i. 72–80.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Sa'd frequently transmits reports on the authority of the Kalbīs: *Ṭabaqāt*, i. 27, 30, 60–5, 250–1; ii. 244; iii. 31–2; iv. 100, 145; 231; vi. 117, 179.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., vi. 341–2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., i. 39–41.

<sup>60</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 152; Caskel, *Ġamharat*, i. 118.

Muslim scholars deem as untrustworthy some religiously-oriented reports<sup>61</sup> that Muḥammad al-Kalbī related on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ.<sup>62</sup> This orientation is even stronger in later biographical dictionaries, where some scholars preserve accounts in which al-Kalbī admits that all he took from Abū Ṣāliḥ on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās was false.<sup>63</sup>

The above-mentioned information about these four figures offers insights into the process in which early Muslim historians restructured Arab-Islamic materials to transcend local concerns in favour of broader thematic and chronological settings. As authorities on genealogy, the Kalbīs played an important role in this transitional stage in which Islamic sources, such as Qur’ān, *ḥadīth* literature, *sīra*, were combined with biblical materials and reorganized to achieve a conspicuous placement of Islam in universal history. No wonder that the influence of Hishām al-Kalbī on many historians, particularly on Ibn Ḥabīb, is noticeable.

The transition from local Arab-Islamic themes to universal portrayals becomes clearer as we compare Ibn Ḥabīb’s account of prophetic intervals with those of other Muslim scholars, such as Ibn Sa’d (d. 845),<sup>64</sup> al-Ṭabarī (d. 923),<sup>65</sup> and al-Maḳdisī (d. ca. 970).<sup>66</sup> It is beneficial to our discussion to compare first the reports of Ibn Ḥabīb and Ibn Sa’d because the differences between their accounts are more distinct than the differences from the other historians, and because they were closer in time to each other.

Ibn Sa’d’s chronological organization of the prophetic narratives consists of three consecutive reports, where only the third is comparable to that of Ibn Ḥabīb. He applies the term, ‘generations (*qurūn*)’<sup>67</sup> to chronologically define prophetic intervals presented in the first two reports. Ibn Sa’d transmits the first report on the authority of ‘Ikrima

<sup>61</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm relates, for example, that Muḥammad al-Kalbī composed a Qur’ānic exegesis that some scholars criticized for not being compatible in certain points with Islamic beliefs. See *Fihrist*, 152.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 152–7; al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rīkh*, xiv. 46; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmā’ al-rijāl* (ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma’rūf; Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1992), xxv. 246–52.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, i. 417; ix. 178–9; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, xxv. 250; Ibn Qudāma, *al-Muntakhab*, 127; al-Dhahabī, *Mizān*, ii. 3–4.

<sup>64</sup> Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, i. 44–5.

<sup>65</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, ii. 237–8 (ed. De Goeje, i. 1072).

<sup>66</sup> al-Maḳdisī, *Bad’*, ii. 153.

<sup>67</sup> On the evolution of term *qarn* in Islamic sources, see my ‘The Evolution of the Term “qarn” in Early Islamic Sources’, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 72/1 (2013): 99–110.

(d. 723),<sup>68</sup> with a different *isnād*<sup>69</sup> recounting that ten generations were between Adam and Noah.<sup>70</sup> The same report appears in the works of Ibn Qutayba<sup>71</sup> and al-Ṭabarī,<sup>72</sup> where the latter provides an *isnād* going back to Ibn ‘Abbās.<sup>73</sup> Ibn Sa‘d presents the second report without *isnād* on the authority of the historian al-Wāqidī (d. 823), relating that ten generations (*qurūn*) were between Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Ibn Sa‘d concludes his narration by defining the term *qarn*, as equal to 100 years.<sup>74</sup> The use of *qurūn* as a chronological structure in these two reports serves as a further indication of the shift in the presentation of prophetic narratives from local-religious needs to a broader chronological structure reminiscent of universal historical presentations.

Ibn Sa‘d’s third report, equivalent to that of Ibn Ḥabīb, specifies the number of years separating Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. Using the same *isnād*, he relates that between Moses and Jesus 1900 years passed and 569 years separated Jesus and Muḥammad.<sup>75</sup> Ibn Sa‘d provides an explicit number for these three intervals seemingly because the three competing monotheistic religions are associated with these prophets. The differences between Ibn Sa‘d and Ibn Ḥabīb are not only expressed in the number of years, but also in the absence of David from the former’s account. These distinctions seem to suggest that Ibn Sa‘d’s narrative organization signifies an earlier stage in Islamic incorporation of biblical sources, focusing on distinguishing Islam’s religious identity from Judaism and Christianity. The absence of David from Ibn Sa‘d’s account, versus his appearance in the other reports, further substantiates this conjecture.

Ibn Ḥabīb’s presentation of prophetic intervals resembles those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Maḥdī. Besides differences in the number of years, these accounts differ primarily in the narrative placement. While Ibn Ḥabīb opens the *Muḥabbar* with the prophetic chronology, al-Ṭabarī, who uses an annalistic arrangement, places this topic under the presentation of the

<sup>68</sup> ‘Ikrima was the *mawla* of Ibn ‘Abbās and one of his prominent students. See Ibn Qutayba, *Ma‘ārif*, 445–57; Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, vii. 22–34.

<sup>69</sup> The *isnād* includes Qabiṣa b. ‘Uqba (d. 830), Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 778), and Sa‘īd b. Masrūq al-Thawrī (d. 744).

<sup>70</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, i. 44.

<sup>71</sup> Ibn Qutayba also adds another version on the authority of Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 732) using the term patriarchs (*ābā’*): see *Ma‘ārif*, 57.

<sup>72</sup> al-Ṭabarī, ii. 235 (ed. De Goeje, i. 1069).

<sup>73</sup> The *isnād* includes Basran scholars: Muḥammad b. Bashshār (d. 866), Abū Dāwūd al-Ṭayālīsī (d. 818), and Hammām b. Yahyā (d. 781), and Dī‘āma (d. 735).

<sup>74</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, i. 44.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 44–5.



Prophet's birth. Al-Maqdisī, who transmits his report on the authority of Ibn Ishāq (d. 767), situates it thematically under the discussion of historical eras.<sup>76</sup> These choices of narrative organization and strategies further substantiate the assertion that the chronological arrangements of prophetic materials constitute the first context where early forms of Islamic universal historical writings appeared.

### 3.2 Jewish history as chronological pointer

Ibn Ḥabīb relates the second section of prophetic history on the authority of al-Haytham b. 'Adī (d. 822), saying:

Abū Ḥātim al-Bajalī narrated on the authority of al-Haytham b. 'Adī, who took this information from the people of the book (*ahl al-kitāb*), that from the time of Adam, peace be upon him, to the Flood there are 2256 years; 1020 years are between Abraham's death and the Flood; 75 years separate Abraham's death and the arrival of the Israelites (*Banū Isrā'īl*) in Egypt; from Jacob's entrance to Egypt and the Exodus of Moses 150 years; 260 years are between the Exodus of Moses and the construction of the First Temple; 2240 years are between the consecration of the First Temple and the kingship (*mulk*) of Nebuchadnezzar and the destruction of the Temple. This is al-Haytham b. 'Adī's version, whereas it was claimed that others corrected him saying that it was 1245 years. Consequently, 258 years are between the year 245 AH and the time when the Prophet, may God praise and protect him, was entrusted with his prophetic mission (*mab'ath*).<sup>77</sup>

Ibn Ḥabīb offers here a combination of his chronological presentation of prophetic intervals with important junctures in Jewish history. He presents his account without *isnād* on the authority of al-Haytham b. 'Adī whose information originates in Jewish sources. Before examining this account, let us provide some information about Ibn 'Adī. Islamic sources describe him as a well-versed scholar in non-Islamic history, Arab genealogies, and poetry. Yet his reliability is greatly questioned when the transmission of religiously-oriented reports is involved.<sup>78</sup> Ibn 'Adī's contributions to the evolution of Islamic historical writing are evident in a number of areas. He was among the earliest Muslim historians to combine *ṭabaqāt* and *ta'rikh* into historical writing while

<sup>76</sup> al-Maqdisī provides seven reports showing the use of different systems for calculating time. *Bad'*, ii. 151–5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibn Ḥabīb, *Muḥabbar*, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 159–60; Dūrī, *Baḥth*, 42–3; Stefan Leder, *Das Korpus al-Haytham ibn 'Adī (st. 207/822): Herkunft, Überlieferung, Gestalt früher Texte der aḥbār Literatur* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1991), 14–16, 27–30; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 38 n. 26.



incorporating events and biographies into a chronological framework.<sup>79</sup> He was also, if not the first, among the earliest historians to write annalistic history as is evident in his book, *al-Ta'rikh 'alā al-sinīn* (History according to the years).<sup>80</sup> No doubt, Ibn 'Adī's historical writing in terms of sources, themes, and style influenced later Muslim historians. His impact on Ibn Ḥabīb can be seen in the tabular presentations of persons,<sup>81</sup> and themes, such as the *mathālib*.<sup>82</sup> The fact that Ibn al-Nadīm reports that Ibn 'Adī wrote a book titled *al-Muḥabbar* lends further support to Ibn 'Adī's influence on Ibn Ḥabīb.<sup>83</sup>

As for the report's content, Ibn Ḥabīb presents a timetable for important phases in prophetic narratives juxtaposed with turning points in Jewish history. By applying this structure, he offers a different angle to portray prophetic eras and situate them chronologically within the larger context of biblical-Jewish history. The narrative arrangement of this account bears a great resemblance, primarily in terms of structure, to *Seder Olam Rabba*, which represents Babylonian Rabbinic stance on biblical chronology.<sup>84</sup> Such is the case with using the Flood,<sup>85</sup> the arrival of the Israelites in Egypt,<sup>86</sup> and the destruction of the Temple<sup>87</sup> as chronological eras. A comparison between Ibn Ḥabīb's report here and his first account of prophetic intervals seems to signify a gradual process within which early Muslim scholars sought to conceptually and chronologically define narrations and historical interconnections. This assumption can be further substantiated by comparing Ibn Ḥabīb's account with that of al-Ṭabarī.<sup>88</sup> The content and the arrangement of these reports are almost identical; minor variations exist primarily with regard to the number of years and the interconnections between the different eras.<sup>89</sup> However, the main distinction between these two accounts is that al-Ṭabarī includes the reign of Alexander the Great as an

<sup>79</sup> Leder, *Korpus*, 30–3.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 253–4; Noth, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 42–3.

<sup>81</sup> Leder, *Korpus*, 202–8; 220–2.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 232–7.

<sup>83</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 160.

<sup>84</sup> Heinrich Guggenheimer (transl. and commentary), *Seder Olam, the Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998), x–xiii.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 3, 12, 46.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 30, 37–40.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 217–19, 228, 237.

<sup>88</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 238 (ed. De Goeje, i. 1070).

<sup>89</sup> al-Ṭabarī relates, for example, that between Jacob entering Egypt and the Exodus of Moses 550 years passed, and 446 years separates the building of the first Temple and its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar.

era. The appearance of Alexander demonstrates a later phase in the search for new sources, where Greco-Roman materials begin to surface in Islamic historical writings. Again, these distinctions, testify to the gradual evolution in Islamic application of non-Islamic materials to create clearer historical accounts based on more developed systems of periodization.

### 3.3 *The life-span of Prophets*

Ibn Ḥabīb's third section of prophetic narratives lists the names of biblical figures along with their life-span. He bases this account on certain Jewish scholars<sup>90</sup> and compares this information with that of Hishām b. al-Kalbī. According to this report, Ibn Ḥabīb narrates that:

The life-span of Adam, peace be upon him, was 930 years;<sup>91</sup> Seth 712 years,<sup>92</sup> but Ibn al-Kalbī claimed 930 years; Enosh (*Anūsh*) 905 years<sup>93</sup> or 957 according to Ibn al-Kalbī; Kenan (*Qīnān*) 910 years<sup>94</sup> or 920 according to Ibn al-Kalbī; Mahalalel 895 years;<sup>95</sup> Jared (*Yarid*) 962 years.<sup>96</sup> Enoch (*Aḥnūkh*), Idris, who was the first among Adam's children to be entrusted with prophethood... lived to be 305 years,<sup>97</sup> but Ibn al-Kalbī claims that his life amounted to... 165 years. Methuselah (*Mitūshlakh*) son of Enoch 969 years<sup>98</sup> and 1170 years according to Ibn al-Kalbī; Lamech (*Lumak*) 777 years.<sup>99</sup> Noah's (*Nūḥ*) life-span was 950 years<sup>100</sup> and God entrusted him with prophethood when he was 480 years. He called upon his people to follow the prophetic message, but only a few followed him. God then commanded him to build the ship... and he boarded it... he lived after [the Flood] 350 years<sup>101</sup> while others claim 598 years, but Ibn al-Kalbī maintains 900 years; Arpachshad's (*Arfakhshad*) life-span was 498 years;<sup>102</sup> Shelah's (*Shālīḥ*) 433 years,<sup>103</sup> but 493 years according to Ibn al-Kalbī; Eber

<sup>90</sup> Ibn Ḥabīb recounts that he took this information from Jewish scholars who lived in the area of 'Nathan River', about which I was unable to find any information.

<sup>91</sup> The same number of years appears in Genesis 5: 5.

<sup>92</sup> Seth lived 912 years. Genesis 5: 8.

<sup>93</sup> The same number of years in Genesis 5: 11.

<sup>94</sup> The same number of years in Genesis 5: 14.

<sup>95</sup> The same number of years in Genesis 5: 17.

<sup>96</sup> The same number of years in Genesis 5: 20.

<sup>97</sup> Enoch lived 365 years. Genesis 5: 23.

<sup>98</sup> The same number of years in Genesis 5: 27.

<sup>99</sup> The same number of years in Genesis 5: 31.

<sup>100</sup> The same number of years in Genesis 9: 29.

<sup>101</sup> The same phrase appears in Genesis 9: 28.

<sup>102</sup> Arpachshad's life-span was 438 years, according to Genesis 11: 12–13.

<sup>103</sup> The same number of years in Genesis 11: 14–15.

(‘*Ābir*) lived 134 years<sup>104</sup> or 463 according to Ibn al-Kalbī; Peleg (*Fāligh*) 239 years<sup>105</sup> or 290 according to Ibn al-Kalbī; Reu (*Arghwaā*) 232 years,<sup>106</sup> or 269 years according to Ibn al-Kalbī; Serug (*Ashrug*) 230 years;<sup>107</sup> Nahor (*Nahūr*) 148 years;<sup>108</sup> Terah (*Tāriḥ*) who is Āzar 250 years.<sup>109</sup> Abraham (*Ibrāhīm*), peace be upon him, lived to be 175<sup>110</sup> years or 195 years according to others; Isaac (*Ishāq*) 150 years,<sup>111</sup> 185 years according to others; Joseph (*Yūsuf*) 120 years;<sup>112</sup> Moses (*Mūsā*) son of ‘Imrān ... 120 years;<sup>113</sup> Aaron (*Hārūn*) son of ‘Imrān 123 years;<sup>114</sup> Job (*Ayyūb*) ... 200 years;<sup>115</sup> and David (*Dāwūd*) ... 70 years.<sup>116</sup> The discrepancies between these versions are extensive, particularly between the first one and that of Ibn al-Kalbī and God knows better. For I was unable to pinpoint the correct version.<sup>117</sup>

Ibn Ḥabīb’s use of life-span as a chronological framework provides an additional model for sequential interconnections in prophetic history. The influence on the account of biblical sources, particularly the book of Genesis, in terms of the names and narrative arrangement, is apparent. This resemblance is evident mostly in Ibn Ḥabīb’s tabular construction of the generations from Adam to Noah, which is presented in Genesis 5, and from Arpachshad to Terah, as in Genesis 11. 10–32. Again, Ibn Ḥabīb applies here prophethood both as a connecting theme and chronological pointer. The centrality of prophethood is evident in Ibn Ḥabīb skipping Noah’s sons and moving immediately to Arpachshad, who is considered in Islamic sources as the father of prophets and messengers.<sup>118</sup> Finally, the absence of Ismā’il or other Arab prophets in this passage is noticeable; I believe it has to do, primarily, with considerations related to Ibn Ḥabīb’s narrative structure. Specifically, it seems that he intends to show parallels between pre-Islamic Arab genealogies and Jewish history at a less controversial stage of the

<sup>104</sup> 433 years according to Genesis 11: 16–17.

<sup>105</sup> The same number of years in Genesis 11: 18–19.

<sup>106</sup> 239 years in Genesis 11: 20–1.

<sup>107</sup> The same number of years in Genesis 11: 22–3.

<sup>108</sup> The same number of years in Genesis 11: 24–5.

<sup>109</sup> 205 in Genesis 11: 32.

<sup>110</sup> The same number of years in Genesis 25: 7.

<sup>111</sup> 180 years in Genesis 35: 28.

<sup>112</sup> 110 years in Genesis 50: 26.

<sup>113</sup> The same number of years in Deuteronomy 34: 7.

<sup>114</sup> The same number of years in Numbers 33: 39.

<sup>115</sup> According to Job 42: 17, he lived 140 years.

<sup>116</sup> The same number of years in 2 Samuel 5: 4.

<sup>117</sup> Ibn Ḥabīb, *Muḥabbar*, 2–5.

<sup>118</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 205 (ed. De Goeje, i. 216).

Prophet's lineage. This orientation is evident in Ibn Ḥabīb's efforts to synchronize the pre-Islamic Arab genealogical past with Jewish history under his discussion of pre-Islamic eras, particularly where he refers, as we shall see, to Ma'add and the *'ām al-tafarruq* (Year of Dispersal).

Ibn Ḥabīb's narrative organization of the life-span of biblical figures reflects early Islamic efforts to incorporate biblical materials in order to place Arab-Islamic genealogies within remote biblical origins and a universal context. In this manner, the *Muḥabbar* represents a middle position between early Islamic endeavours in this regard and universal histories composed during the second half of the ninth century. To assess this conjecture, let us compare Ibn Ḥabīb's presentation here with those of other Muslim scholars.

To begin with Ibn al-Kalbī's *Jamharat*, this work, which is narrated by Ibn Ḥabīb, reflects local Arab concerns focusing on the Prophet's lineage. It provides a detailed discussion of Arab genealogies, emphasizing the Prophet's superiority among Arabs and the tribe of Quraysh. To that end, Ibn al-Kalbī structures his account around three major ancestral circles arranged from the largest to the smallest: northern Arabs; Quraysh; Banū Hāshim.<sup>119</sup> The smaller the circle, the closer to the Prophet and the higher its rank. However, the *Jamhara* ends the Arabs' ancestral genealogies with Ma'add without mentioning previous prophets or even including Ismā'il. Interestingly, a similar narrative organization occurs in Ibn Ḥabīb's *al-Munammaq fī akhbār Quraysh* (The embellished book on the history of Quraysh), which he composed before the *Muḥabbar*.<sup>120</sup> These differences between the *Muḥabbar*, on one hand, and the *Jamhara* and the *Munammaq* on the other, seem to reflect a shift in Islamic historical presentation of genealogical materials from an Arab-local to a broader prophetic-biblical context.

Ibn Hishām's narrative arrangement of the Prophet's genealogies in the *Sīra* resembles that of Ibn al-Kalbī's *Jamhara*, but contains new information. Relying on Ibn Ishāq, he opens the *Sīra* with a genealogical list, tracing the Prophet's lineage back to Adam. He structures his account around four genealogical frames, arranged from the lesser to the greater units: Banū Hāshim, Quraysh, northern Arabs, and biblical prophets. As the eponym of northern Arabs and the connecting link with biblical genealogies, Ismā'il plays a significant role in Ibn Hishām's

<sup>119</sup> Ibn al-Kalbī, *Jamharat al-nasab* (ed. Nājī Ḥasan; Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1986), i. especially 17–37.

<sup>120</sup> Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Munammaq fī akhbār Quraysh* (ed. Khurshid Fāriq; Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1985), 19–36.

presentation.<sup>121</sup> These narrative organizational features reflect early Islamic attempts to combine Arab genealogies and biblical materials in order to provide broader mapping of the Prophet Muḥammad's lineage at both the Arab and prophetic levels. The placement of Arab-Islamic genealogies within a larger prophetic context and remote biblical lineage is the principal strategy employed here to achieve this objective. Ibn Hishām's account, however, lacks any references to the life span of these prophets, except in the case of Ismā'il.

Moving to Ibn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt*, one finds new information and a different narrative strategy for the incorporation of biblical figures. He refers, like other Muslim scholars, to biblical prophets as part of his treatment of Muḥammad's prophetic lineage. Similar to Ibn Hishām, he arranges his narrative around the four cycles of the Prophet's genealogical connections. However, he organizes these spheres from the greater to the smaller: prophetic origins, Arabs (northern Arabs), Quraysh, and Banū Hāshim.<sup>122</sup> Ibn Sa'd then provides, on the authority of Hishām al-Kalbī, a list of 19 prophet-messengers that begins with Adam. His list also includes new names, such as Jesus and the Arab prophets (Hūd and Ṣāliḥ), but without referring to their life spans.<sup>123</sup> A similar narrative arrangement appears in al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb*.<sup>124</sup> However, while Ibn Sa'd's account can be characterized more as religious-prophetic, al-Balādhurī's presentation mirrors Arab-genealogical concerns, focusing on the northern and southern Arabs' genealogical issues.<sup>125</sup>

The comparison of Ibn Ḥabīb's list of prophets' life-spans with the portrayals of this topic in early Islamic universal histories further demonstrates the influential position of *al-Muḥabbar* in early Islamic historiography. Combining Qur'ānic narratives and biblical materials, Ibn Qutayba opens the *Ma'ārif* with the creation story,<sup>126</sup> followed by the presentations of biblical prophets starting with Adam and concluding with Dhū al-Kifl. His references to prophets' life-spans are limited to important figures, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ismā'il, and Moses.<sup>127</sup> Ibn Qutayba's presentation of prophetic history reflects primarily religious-prophetic concerns. His sequential narrative

<sup>121</sup> Ibn Hishām, *al-Strā al-nabawiyya* (ed. 'Umar Tadmurī; Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1990, i. 11–20.

<sup>122</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, i. 17–22; 39–44.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, i. 45–6.

<sup>124</sup> al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, i. 7–74.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 17–100.

<sup>126</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif*, 9–17.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 17–55.



arrangement and its placement in primordial origins mirrors features of universal historical writing.

As for al-Ya'qūbī, he begins the *Ta'rikh* with a chronological presentation of prophetic history from Adam to Jesus in separate accounts detailing their religio-historical background. He concludes each section with the life-spans of these prophets.<sup>128</sup> Notably, al-Ya'qūbī's account of biblical prophets (particularly from Adam to David) closely resembles that of Ibn Ḥabīb. Such is the case with the names of the biblical prophets, the number of years they lived, and the absence of Ismā'īl or other Arab prophets. In fact, al-Ya'qūbī places his treatment of Ismā'īl and other Arab prophets under the treatment of pre-Islamic Arab history.<sup>129</sup> Justifying his choice of narrative organization, al-Ya'qūbī says that the historical interconnection between Ismā'īl and his children, on one hand, and the Prophet and caliphs, on the other, is the rationale for this arrangement.<sup>130</sup> A similar narrative placement of biblical prophets can be found in al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj*.<sup>131</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* provides detailed information about previous prophets that he situates annalistically under the discussion of biblical stories. His narrative arrangement reflects primarily religio-prophetic concerns, emphasizing God's will in history, the transmission of His divine message, and the finality of Muḥammad's prophethood.<sup>132</sup> Like al-Ya'qūbī, al-Ṭabarī refers to the life-span of biblical figures at the end of each section of prophetic stories. His narration in terms of the number of years and names echoes other historians, yet he differs on the placement of these narratives. For example, al-Ṭabarī refers to Ismā'īl in two different locations: under Abraham's story<sup>133</sup> and as part of his discussion of the Prophet's lineage.<sup>134</sup> In some cases he also provides *isnāds*, some of which are traced back to Ibn 'Abbās or associated with the chain of Hishām al-Kalbī→Muḥammad al-Kalbī→Abū Sāliḥ→Ibn

<sup>128</sup> al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1960), i. 5–80.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 221–71.

<sup>130</sup> Providing the rationale for his narrative arrangement, al-Ya'qūbī says: 'We delayed our discussion of the history of Ismā'īl and his children and concluded with them the history of nations because God Almighty sealed prophethood and kingship with them and also because their history is contiguous to the narration of the Messenger of God and the caliphs.' *Ta'rikh*, i. 221.

<sup>131</sup> al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, i. 75–83.

<sup>132</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, i. 88–193; 216–50; 292–376; 384–452; 456–503; 517–57; 585–605 (ed. De Goeje, i. 86–201; 231–74; 325–429; 442–528; 535–97; 619–71; 584–741).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., i. 247–8, 251–62 (ed. De Goeje, i. 270–71, 275–86).

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., ii. 272–6 (ed. De Goeje, i. 1114–23).



‘Abbās. Such is the case with Adam,<sup>135</sup> Kenan,<sup>136</sup> Noah,<sup>137</sup> Khidr,<sup>138</sup> and Moses.<sup>139</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī’s presentation of biblical stories provides a different angle, showing a gradual incorporation of biblical sources into Islamic presentations of prophetic history as well as the strategies applied in narrative arrangements. The use of *isnāds* not only provokes questions of authenticity, they also testify to this gradual process. Al-Ṭabarī’s treatment of the prophets’ life-spans represents, as in the case of *al-Muḥabbar*, another strategy for the chronological arrangement of prophetic narratives. These comparisons between Ibn Ḥabīb’s third report of prophetic narratives and those of other scholars, therefore, testify to the important position that the *Muḥabbar* occupies in the transition from Arab-local needs to universal historical settings.

### *Pre-Islamic eras*

Ibn Ḥabīb’s presentation of important events in pre-Islamic history, which marked the beginnings of a new era, are further examples of chronological arrangement. He particularly refers to three distinctive events in the *jāhili* period: the Year of Dispersal (*‘ām al-tafarruq*),<sup>140</sup> the Year of Perfidy (*‘ām al-ghadr*), and the Year of the Elephant (*‘ām al-fil*). Again, Ibn Ḥabīb makes Muḥammad’s prophethood the basis from which these events can be chronologically measured, and the thematic link to the *Muḥabbar*’s previous sections.

#### *1. The Year of Dispersal*

Referring to his sources, Ibn Ḥabīb writes, ‘Some people whom I encountered related to me that the era of the Arabs (*Ta’rikh al-‘arab*) from which they began to reckon is the Year of Dispersal’.<sup>141</sup> At the centre of his presentation is the departure of Ma‘add b. ‘Adnān from Makka to Syria, escaping Nebuchadnezzar’s punitive invasion of Arabia. Ibn Ḥabīb’s narrative arrangement is based on the thematic combination of Jewish materials, Qur’ānic narratives, and pre-Islamic Arab genealogies aiming to create interconnected historical contexts. Ibn Ḥabīb first

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 158, 160–61 (ed. De Goeje, i. 160, 163).

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 164 (ed. De Goeje, i. 185).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 174, 179–80 (ed. De Goeje, i. 179, 185–6).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 369–73 (ed. De Goeje, i. 420–25).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 388–400 (ed. De Goeje, i. 446–62).

<sup>140</sup> On the development of the theme of *iftirāq* and its political implications see Caskel, *Ġamharat*, i. 41–4; Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 71–4; 209–11.

<sup>141</sup> Ibn Ḥabīb, *Muḥabbar*, 5.

links his narration to Jewish prophetic history. He begins his presentation explaining that God inspired Berechiah, son of Hananiah<sup>142</sup> (*Ibrākhiā b. Aḥniyā*), who was a prophet from the tribe of Judah, to instigate Nebuchadnezzar to carry out a punitive campaign against the Arabs for killing their prophet. Nebuchadnezzar's campaign ended up, adds Ibn Ḥabīb, in Yemen in a place called Ḥuḍūr, where three of Ismā'il's sons lived. Ibn Ḥabīb then situates his narration within the Qur'ānic framework by associating the people of Ḥuḍūr with that of the Rass (*aṣḥāb al-rass*) and citing verses from *Sūrat al-Anbiyā*.<sup>143</sup> He then mentions that the prophet that the people of Ḥuḍūr killed was Hanẓala b. Šafwān, whose identification in Islamic sources is debatable.<sup>144</sup>

Ibn Ḥabīb's second synchronization of the *ʿām al-tafarruq* with Jewish history is linked with the Jewish prophet, Jeremiah, son of Hilkia (*Irmīyā b. Ḥalqīā*).<sup>145</sup> He claims that God inspired him to rescue Ma'add b. 'Adnān from Nebuchadnezzar, adding that one of Ma'add's descendants is destined to be a prophet at the end of time. Jeremiah then took Ma'add out of Makka to Syria and returned with him back to Makka once Nebuchadnezzar had left Arabia. By applying this narrative arrangement, Ibn Ḥabīb aims primarily to establish historical associations between Jewish history and Muḥammad's Arab and prophetic genealogical origins. His organization of the *ʿām al-tafarruq* narrative, therefore, is distinctive. He even seems to be one of the earliest Muslim scholars to portray this event as marking the beginning of an era. To evaluate the extent to which his portrayal of this event is unique, we can compare it with other Islamic sources.

As the son of the eponym of northern Arabs ('Adnān), Ma'add, figures prominently in early Islamic genealogical and historical writings as part of the discussions of the Prophet's lineage and the Arabs' origin.<sup>146</sup> Muslim scholars refer to a ḥadīth in which the Prophet prohibits tracing

<sup>142</sup> It seems likely that Ibn Ḥabīb is referring here to the Berechiah who appears in 1 Chronicles 3: 17–20.

<sup>143</sup> Qur'ān 21: 12–15.

<sup>144</sup> al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, i. 72; ii. 168. Most Islamic works, particularly *tafsīr*, remain silent when it comes to the identity of the prophet sent to the people of the Rass. Al-Qurṭubī was among the few scholars to associate this prophet with Hanẓala. See 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī (ed.), *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 2007), xi. 242.

<sup>145</sup> According to 2 Kings 22: 8, Jeremiah, son of the High Priest, Hilkiah, was a Jewish priest during the kingship of Josiah in Judah.

<sup>146</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i. 11–15, 25; Ibn al-Kalbī, *Jamharat*, i. 18–19; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, i. 18–26; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-'arab* (ed. 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn; Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1962), 8–9; Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 88–94.

his lineage beyond a certain ancestor, but there are disagreements whether he meant Ma'add<sup>147</sup> or 'Adnān.<sup>148</sup> This might be the reason that motivated Ibn Durayd (d. 933) to claim that once Arab genealogies moved beyond 'Adnān and Qaḥṭān, they were dependent on information derived from the 'People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*)'.<sup>149</sup> The presentation of Ma'add as the remotest ancestor, which is first preserved in al-Kalbī's *Jamhara*, enjoys more circulation among Muslim scholars, particularly historians. Al-Kalbī's account begins with referring to the ḥadīth that prohibits tracing the Prophet's ancestry beyond Ma'add. More importantly, he transmits this ḥadīth through the *isnād* of Hishām al-Kalbī → Muḥammad al-Kalbī → Abū Sālīḥ → Ibn 'Abbās.<sup>150</sup> Yet, Ibn al-Kalbī's portrayal is limited to Arab genealogies without making associations with Jewish history.

Al-Kalbī's treatment of the Ma'add's story appears in Ibn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt* under his treatment of the Prophet's lineage. Ibn Sa'd's presentation, however, provides more details that obliquely synchronize Ma'add's time with Jewish history. He relates on the authority of Hishām al-Kalbī that Ma'add's genealogy is mentioned in a book written by Baruch, son of Neria (*Būrukḥ b. Nāriyya*), Jeremiah's scribe (*kātib Irmiyā*).<sup>151</sup> Ibn Sa'd also alludes briefly to the story that Ma'add was with Nebuchadnezzar when the latter invaded Yemen.<sup>152</sup> However, unlike Ibn Ḥabīb's account, nothing is mentioned in Ibn Sa'd's report about 'ām al-tafarruq or the placement of Ma'add's story within Jewish history.

References to both the presentation of Ma'add and Jewish history (particularly Jeremiah) appear in some early Islamic universal histories, but the connection between these accounts is absent.<sup>153</sup> Al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* is the first place where one encounters a narrative arrangement reminiscent of Ibn Ḥabīb's account. He first relates that he bases this report on scholars other than Hishām al-Kalbī, who were knowledgeable in the *akhbār* of the old nations, but without specifying the identity

<sup>147</sup> al-Kalbī, *Jamharat*, 17; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, i. 46–7; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, i. 271 (ed. De Goeje, i. 1112); al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 228.

<sup>148</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif*, 117; Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, i. 17; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Anbāh*, 17; al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-unuf fī tafsīr al-sīra al-nabawiyya li-Ibn Hishām* (ed. Majdī al-Shūrī; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), i. 32.

<sup>149</sup> Ibn Durayd, *Kitāb al-Ishtiqāq* (*Abu Bekr Muhammed ben el-Hasan Ibn Doreid's genealogisch-etymologisches Handbuch*) (ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld; Göttingen: Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1854), 4.

<sup>150</sup> al-Kalbī, *Jamharat*, i. 17.

<sup>151</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, i. 46–7; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, iii. 6.

<sup>152</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, i. 49.

<sup>153</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif*, 63–4, 47–8; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, i. 65, 223.

of these other scholars.<sup>154</sup> Al-Ṭabarī's account, as in the case of Ibn Ḥabīb, is structured around the interconnection between the Ma'add story, Nebuchadnezzar's punitive invasion of Arabia, and Jewish history. Unlike Ibn Ḥabīb, he presents both Berechiah and Jeremiah<sup>155</sup> as joining hands to rescue Ma'add. Furthermore, al-Ṭabarī neither defines this event as *'ām al-tafarruq* nor considers it as an era in pre-Islamic history.

A clear consideration of *'ām al-tafarruq* as an era is found in al-Mas'ūdī's *Tanbih*, yet his narrative organization is different from that of Ibn Ḥabīb. Al-Mas'ūdī's does not associate this event with Ma'add; rather he depicts it as part of the diffusion of the children of Nizār b. Ma'add. He also does not synchronize this account with Jewish history.<sup>156</sup> These comparisons between Ibn Ḥabīb's account of *'ām al-tafarruq* and those of previous Muslim historians, therefore, demonstrate that his presentation is exceptional. His narrative chronological arrangement and its placement within a broader historical context and biblical origins emphasize this distinction.

## 2 The Year of Perfidy

The era of the Year of Perfidy is associated, according to Ibn Ḥabīb, with the story of two brothers from the tribe of Tamīm, Aws and Ḥaṣāba, who journeyed to perform the pilgrimage. Arriving in Makka, they encountered near the idols, placed in the Precinct, a king carrying the Ka'ba covering. Aws and Ḥaṣāba killed the king and took the covering. When the other tribes learned about this murder, they betrayed the Tamīm by fighting them during the forbidden months. Ibn Ḥabīb's presentation of this event and particularly its designation as an era is unique.<sup>157</sup> No mention of these events is found in previous sources or in early Islamic universal histories. Al-Mas'ūdī seems to have been the first universal historian to refer to the *'ām al-ghadr* as part of his discussion of pre-Islamic eras. It seems that al-Mas'ūdī is influenced here by Ibn Ḥabīb, because he mentions seven pre-Islamic eras some of which he transmits on Ibn Ḥabīb's authority.<sup>158</sup> Indeed, the Year of Perfidy is limited to local Arab domain, but it functions as one of the important events, along with the Year of the Elephant, by which Ibn Ḥabīb chronologically situates Muḥammad's prophethood.

<sup>154</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, i. 559–60 (ed. De Goeje, i. 673–5).

<sup>155</sup> al-Ṭabarī offers a report on the authority of Wāḥb b. Munabbih in which Wāḥb identifies Jeremiah with al-Khidr. See *Ta'rikh*, i. 366 (ed. De Goeje, i. 415).

<sup>156</sup> al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, 189.

<sup>157</sup> Lichtenstädter, 'Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb', 15–16.

<sup>158</sup> al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, 189.

### 3 The Year of the Elephant

Early Islamic sources are abundant with references to the Year of the Elephant, in which the king of Ethiopia attempted to destroy the Ka'ba. No doubt, the association of this event with the year in which the Prophet was born turned this era into an important chronological signifier in early Islamic historical writings.<sup>159</sup> Ibn Ḥabīb's narrative arrangement of the Year of the Elephant has certain distinctive features. Other Muslim scholars apply the Prophet's birth as the chronological axis through which the Year of the Elephant and other related events intersect. Such is the case with al-Balādhurī, Ibn Qutayba, al-Ya'qūbī, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Mas'ūdī.<sup>160</sup> Unlike these historians, Ibn Ḥabīb uses the beginning of Muḥammad's prophetic message as the chronological axis. For example, he relates that forty years separate the Year of the Elephant and the beginning of Muḥammad's prophethood, and one hundred and fifty years are between the Year of Perfidy and the year he was entrusted with prophethood. Ibn Ḥabīb also synchronizes the beginning of Muḥammad's prophethood with the rulership of Persia, Hira, and Yemen. For example, he relates that the year in which Muḥammad was entrusted with prophethood coincides with the twentieth or the sixteenth year of the reign of Khusrau II Abarwiz (r. 590/1–628), when Bādham Abū Mihrān served as the governor of Yemen.<sup>161</sup> Ibn Ḥabīb's narrative organization of the era of the Year of the Elephant points to his intention to link it with his previous presentations of prophetic history that revolve chronologically around Muḥammad's prophethood.

## CONCLUSION

Ibn Ḥabīb's *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar* represents, as this paper illustrates, a significant phase in the evolution of early Islamic historical thought in general and gives insights into the emergence of universal historical writing in particular. This assessment is exemplified in the author's narrative organizations to reconfigure the chronology of prophetic and genealogical materials so as to create broader thematic interconnections

<sup>159</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i. 183; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, i. 80; Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif*, 150; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, i. 75–7; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, ii. 9; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, i. 154 (ed. De Goeje, i. 966).

<sup>160</sup> al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, i. 100; Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif*, 150; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, ii. 9; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, i. 154 (ed. De Goeje, i. 966); al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 228.

<sup>161</sup> A similar chronological arrangement for Muḥammad's prophethood is provided by al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, ii. 229.

and universal historical contexts. Chronological narrative arrangements related to the successiveness and finality of Muḥammad's prophethood constitute, therefore, the beginning of Islamic universal historical writings.

Ibn Ḥabīb's chronological construction of prophetic history and the application of certain organizational strategies aim to create thematic and sequential interconnections between Islamic narratives and biblical-Jewish histories. Muḥammad's prophetic mission (*nubuwwa*) serves as the main thematic and chronological axis around which Ibn Ḥabīb's arrangements of prophetic history revolve. An analysis of these narrative arrangements demonstrates shifts in early Islamic historical presentations from local Arab-Islamic needs to broader universal settings. This process seems to have begun with endeavours to place Arab-Islamic themes (such as pre-Islamic Arab genealogy and history) within a larger prophetic historical context. To that end, Muslim scholars began to search for new sources to supplement insufficient information about previous prophets. Biblical-Jewish materials were the first to be consulted and integrated into the new Islamic narrative organizations.

The analysis of the arrangements of prophetic history in the *Muḥabbar* also demonstrates that the process of Islamic incorporation of biblical sources was gradual; and reflected different stages in the evolution of the early Arab-Islamic community's religious identity and historical consciousness. Two major motives prompted the incorporation of biblical sources into early Islamic presentations of prophetic history: religious-prophetic and Arab-genealogical. Arab genealogies as preserved in the works of the Kalbīs were critical in the shift in early Islamic prophetic narratives from local Arab-Islamic themes to universal settings and biblical origins. Muḥammad's prophethood and his lineage function in these presentations as a connecting link between the religious-prophetic and Arab-genealogical facets. These chronological narrative organizations, strategies, and sources that feature in the *Muḥabbar* paved the way for the emergence of early Islamic universal histories during the ninth and the tenth centuries.